
Government of the District of Columbia



**Office of the Deputy Mayor for
Public Safety and Justice**

Testimony of
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***Public Oversight Hearing on “Effective Youth
Development: A Strategy to Prevent Juvenile Homicides
and Youth Violence”***

Special Committee on the Prevention of Youth Violent Crime
Vincent C. Gray, Chair
Council of the District of Columbia

July 11, 2005

Room 500
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
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Good morning Chairperson Gray and members of the Special Committee on the Prevention of Youth Violent Crime. I am Edward Reiskin, Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice. Mr. Chairperson, I would first like to thank you and the entire the Council for holding this Public Oversight Hearing on the Administration's Youth Development Strategy to Prevent Juvenile Homicides and Youth Violence. As Deputy Mayor Albert said, there is no area more worthy of our focus than youth. We can never be a great city if we fail our youth, and it is a responsibility of all of us in government and in our communities to ensure we don't.

My testimony will outline the integral role that public safety officials play in this strategy in collaboration with the District's social services agencies and our partners in the community. I will also speak briefly on the existing youth development initiatives implemented by the Metropolitan Police Department to address and prevent crime in which youth are either the victims or the offenders.

Before I address our strategy this morning I would first like to revisit the circumstances that fueled the formation of this Special Committee and enter into the record the most recent indicators at our disposal on juvenile homicide and youth violence.

As you know, the MPD issued a report in January of this year on juvenile homicide in the District that sought to understand the nature and extent of the problem of juvenile violence that led to a dramatic increase in the number of young people murdered in 2004. The report and associated joint hearing drew much needed attention to the subject and focused our attention on comprehensive, long-term solutions to youth violence that engage our partners inside and outside the government.

While we cannot yet conclude that 2004 was a momentary spike rather than a sign of a broader trend, we are cautiously optimistic that there will be fewer juvenile homicide victims in 2005. As of today, there have been six juvenile homicides in 2005, down from 15 over the same period in 2004.¹ Of course, when it comes to our children, however, no loss is tolerable, and we continue to work towards our goal of zero.

Perhaps most perplexing is that the increase in juvenile homicides in 2004 took place against a backdrop of falling crime rates in nearly every other category. DC experienced an almost 18 percent reduction in crime in calendar year 2004. That followed a nearly 9 percent drop in crime the year before. An important facet of this trend is that the benefits were shared by residents across the city – there were reductions in every major crime category and in each of the seven police districts in 2004.² Through the hard work and vigilance of many, this trend is continuing in calendar year 2005. Serious crime is down more than 14% through June 2005 over the same period in 2004.³

¹ Preliminary DC Index crime data (subject to change), <http://mpdc.dc.gov>

² Testimony of the Chief of Police before the DC Council Committee on the Judiciary on Metropolitan Police Department Performance in FY2004, March 10, 2005

³ Citywide Monthly Crime Statistics, <http://mpdc.dc.gov>

And as members of Congress debate the repeal of our handgun ban with total disregard for home rule, the number of homicides in the District continues to fall. Homicides fell by more than 20 percent from 2003 to 2004. Last year, the District ended the year with fewer than 200 homicides for the first time since 1986. In the first six months of 2005, the number of homicides has dropped by another 4 percent over the same period in 2004.

In part, we attribute this success to the model of focus and coordination that characterizes the Hot Spots initiative, which has brought down crime in some of our more challenged neighborhoods at an even greater rate than the District as a whole. But all the statistics in the world matter very little to the victims of violent crime and their families. Crime in the District, and particularly in some neighborhoods, and particularly with respect to youth, remains unacceptably high. We know all too well that every act of violence leaves an indelible scar, exposing a breakdown in our mutual responsibilities to prevent violent crime. We are therefore not easing up on our efforts; on the contrary, we are redoubling them. And we are doing so in part through the Administration's Youth Development Strategy to Reduce Juvenile Homicide and Youth Violence.

As you heard this morning from Deputy Mayor Albert, the youth development strategy involves several key collaborations between his cluster and the public safety cluster. Specifically, the Second Responder Program will seek to close the gap between the police and social service providers by rapidly converging resources on families and juvenile victims and perpetrators of crime when violence occurs and through early identification of youth at-risk. An initial pilot bringing together the MPD with the Departments of Mental Health (DMH) and Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) will assign case workers to the Sixth and Seventh police districts in Wards 7 and 8 to be "on-call" during the hours that result in the most incidents of youth violence. Police officers will cross-train with case workers ensure the immediate crisis intervention services and case management response provided by the social services representatives does not interfere with the necessary law enforcement responsibilities of the apprehending officer.

The MPD will also assist the Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation (CYITC) to select community-based organizations that will train other organizations on proven gang intervention strategies. These Gang Intervention Trainings will apply aspects of the successful strategies employed by the Gang Intervention Partnership in Columbia Heights and the East of the River Clergy-Police-Community Partnership to other neighborhoods with evidence of gang or similar activity.

As the District's lead law enforcement agency, the MPD will also continue to collaborate with DYRS, the Division of Social Services of the DC Superior Court, and our community and faith-based partners to develop a continuum of care for youth involved in the juvenile justice system as part of our youth development strategy. As part of this effort, the MPD is working to co-locate officers at the Court Social Services building at 409 E Street, NW, as early as next month.

An additional area of collaboration is currently taking place on the Child Fatality Review Committee. The agencies that form the CFRC are part of the District's overall strategy to

prevent youth violent crime by improving communication, coordination, and service planning. The CFRC's Recommendations Subcommittee issues quarterly recommendations. As a result of these recommendations, the agencies in the public safety cluster have implemented significant changes to improve public safety by helping to prevent juvenile homicide and youth violence.

The MPD's Special Victims Unit (SVU) investigates all suicide deaths for children under the age of 12 years, as recommended by the CFRC, to ensure consistency in investigative practices, including obtaining baseline information during initial interviews at the scene of the fatal injury. All other suicide deaths continue to be investigated by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME). The MPD is also making the appropriate referrals and notifications to CFSA where a child dies in the home and there is a surviving minor sibling or siblings. The MPD's SVU is investigating all domestic-related homicides resulting from family violence when the victim is under the age of 18 years, not including natural or accidental deaths, as recommended by the CFRC.

OCME has been making solid progress in reducing its backlog of cases as well as addressing staffing levels to meet 24-hour death pronouncement demands. Within the next few months OCME will implement a policy to add viral tests as a routine part of the autopsy process for infants when circumstances are suggestive of an infectious process and a bacterial etiology cannot be identified. OCME has collaborated with the Department of Health to have the tests conducted at the DOH Public Health Lab.

The Department of Corrections (DOC) provides the following services: routine and comprehensive medical assessment and treatment; prenatal and post-partum care; birth control/family planning; and HIV/STD treatment/monitoring to incarcerated women. In addition, services are provided as needed through Greater Southeast Community Hospital.

The Fire and Emergency Medical Services (FEMS) Department Juvenile Firesetter Counselor has had several training sessions with social workers and supervisors from the Department of Human Services who work with children and families and daycare providers from the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA). In these sessions, DHS and CFSA employees were trained to recognize the need for the juvenile firesetter program in youths and were provided referral instructions. Additional sessions with employees from both agencies are scheduled for later in July.

FEMS is also making use of many opportunities to publicize fire safety information through the media each year, as recommended by CFRC. In addition to encouraging media outlets to stress safety tips when covering fires in the District, the agency seeks coverage of other Department-sponsored events designed to call attention to fire safety education. Among these events are the Fire Safety Olympics, events during National Fire Prevention Week in October, smoke alarm distributions in neighborhoods, Metro station distribution of safety material, and the Change Your Clock, Change Your Battery education campaign that encourages changing smoke alarm batteries when Daylight Savings Time starts or ends.

These events help to create media interest in DCFEMS activities and help us disseminate safety information to a wider audience. Generally, traditional media is not the only or most effective way to reach juveniles. This population is not the target audience for news broadcasts and packaged public service announcements aired for free by television and radio are not necessarily aired at times juveniles are watching television or listening to the radio. Therefore, FEMS is working to stronger partnership with DCPS would help reduce the risk of fire related fatalities by taking public service announcements and fire safety education directly to the youth audience.

Less than two weeks ago, on June 30, 2005, the CFRC issued another round of quarterly recommendations to improve communication, coordination, and service planning. Among them are important areas that we will consider in the coming months, such as instituting “sweeps” in the hot spots to address the problem of congregating youth in violation of the District’s curfew law. The CFRC is also interested in the MPD’s Policing for Prevention strategy and Police Service Area (PSA) deployment, which will be the subject of Chief Ramsey’s meeting later this week with members of the Council. Another recommendation addresses the convening of a conference on reducing gang activity similar to the successful 2003 Crime Summit convened by the Mayor.

Beyond the initiatives presented today, the Metropolitan Police Department continues to employ a public safety strategy that encompasses a wide range of prevention, intervention, and enforcement efforts targeting every category of crime. And as crime in nearly every category continues to fall, the District recognizes that intensified efforts are required to combat persistent problems plaguing the city, such as juvenile homicide and youth violence.

Crime data from the last three years indicates that juvenile victims are most likely to die at the hands of someone 18 to 24 years of age. To stop juvenile criminal activity from escalating early on, the MPD employs enforcement of the law to deter juvenile offenders from engaging in more serious criminal activity in the future. This strategy of enforcement as a means of intervention followed by aggressive prosecution and progressive sanctions sends an unambiguous message to juvenile offenders that criminal behavior will not be tolerated in DC.

Overall, juvenile arrests increased by more than 15 percent in 2004 over 2003, with a particular emphasis on “gateway” crimes, such as juvenile car theft, curfew violations, and truancy. During the first six months of 2005, the MPD made 1,452 juvenile arrests, reflecting a persistent, intensive focus on juvenile crime.

Regarding enforcement of the unauthorized use of an automobile (UUV), MPD actively participates in a regional partnership called Washington Area Vehicle Enforcement (WAVE) that has been very successful. In 2004 alone, WAVE resulted in 414 arrests and 381 vehicles recovered (including 14 car-jacked vehicles) at a value of \$4.5 million. Seventy-one stolen license plates were recovered, 32 felony warrants were served, and 21 misdemeanor warrants were served as a result of this initiative. Many of the WAVE arrests contributed to the MPD’s ability to identify and arrest 568 juveniles for UUV in 2004, down slightly from 617 juvenile

UUV arrests in 2003. And the MPD is continuing its efforts to crack down on juvenile car theft in 2005 by making 240 UUV arrests so far this year.⁴

Another program, Operation Prevent Auto Theft (OPAT), is a joint effort between MPD and Court Social Services. It was reconstituted this April with a second group joining last month in June. To date there are 26 youth participating in OPAT. In addition, the MPD is running a summer camp for court involved youth, a large number of which have been charged with auto theft. In these programs, the youth perform a number of community-based restitution projects and undergo counseling sessions on accountability and responsibility. The program has been successful in the past at reducing the recidivism rate among juveniles on probation and has been instrumental in assisting the Sixth District in its current reduction in auto theft.

In March, I joined community leaders and members of the faith community at Kenilworth Recreation Center to introduce a collaborative initiative between East of the River Clergy-Police-Community Partnership and other community organizations to help at-risk youth overcome the influences of drugs, crime and violence in their communities. The \$400,000 grant from the District government directed funds toward the East of the River Clergy Police Community Partnership's new program in Ward 7 to positively engage youth. The focus of the grant administered by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families, and Elders is twofold, including:

- Mentoring to 50-100 youth participants within Wards 7 & 8 and
- Community Capacity Building to mobilize parents, residents, youth, government agencies, neighborhood service providers and community stakeholders around solutions to youth violence and community despair.

The mentoring program is enrolling 50-100 mentees in a program that uses a combination of one-on-one, aggressive, group and team mentoring approaches to interact with and support at-risk and high-risk youth. Youth participating in the program will come through school or re-entry programs, outreach efforts and activities undertaken or sponsored by the Grantee through out Wards 7 and 8. Agencies that may refer youth to this program will include but are not limited to: Metropolitan Police Department, Youth Services Administration, Court Social Services, Department of Health, Department of Mental Health, Department of Human Services, the Strong Families Program and community-based organizations.

The District has also redoubled its efforts to enforce curfew and truancy laws as a means of intervening early to prevent more serious juvenile crime. Last summer the District opened two new curfew centers, allowing the MPD to issue more than 1,200 violations in 2004 a staggering increase from the 230 violations issued in 2003. Since the beginning of this calendar year, the MPD has issued approximately 1,425 curfew violations, already outpacing last year's total. And over the past 18 months, the MPD picked up over 4,600 truants, including 1,553 in 2005 alone.

⁴ Preliminary DC Index crime data (subject to change), <http://mpdc.dc.gov>

All of these activities provide lessons for those of us in the public safety sector. One such lesson is that the problems of neighborhood crime and violence do not respect boundaries and too often spill over into our schools. This spill-over effect was one important reason for extending our public safety strategy to include the transfer of management responsibility for school security from DC Public Schools (DCPS) to the MPD.

On July 1, the MPD assumed management of the school security contract and now oversees the performance of the private security personnel in our public schools. The new contract represents the collective efforts of the MPD, DCPS, and the Office of Contracting and Procurement and includes, among other noteworthy provisions, higher standards for the selection and training of school security personnel.

The MPD will maintain the presence of its School Resource Officers (SROs), whose ranks rose to 99 plus 14 supervisors this year. SROs and their sergeants will continue to provide a uniform police presence at junior and senior high schools throughout the District and facilitate critical coordination with patrol officers in the surrounding Police Service Areas (PSAs), in order to prevent some of the spill over effect. More importantly, the collaboration between MPD and DCPS has been strengthened and formalized through the school security comprehensive plan.

Finally, to truly prevent crime and the fear of crime the MPD is engaged in countless community partnerships and interagency collaborations to build healthy neighborhoods throughout the District as part of its Policing for Prevention strategy. The strategy applies three approaches to crime, including focused law enforcement, neighborhood partnerships, and systemic prevention. I would like to highlight several of these programs that address the underlying causes of crime in our city:

Focused Law Enforcement

- Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) works to prevent violence, among both juveniles and adults, by identifying the city's gangs and crews that are more likely to commit violent crimes based on current intelligence. The project reaches out directly to members of these groups, setting clear standards for their behavior, and backing up that message by "pulling every lever" legally available when those standards are violated.

The first phase of PSN took place in 2004 in Sursum Corda, with a wave of arrests and a crackdown on violent offenders. Then in January, a mandatory "call-in" was held with offenders on conditional release who are known to be involved with violent groups in other parts of the city – in the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Districts. The arrests and resulting prosecutions in Sursum Corda were used to set an example to the call-in group that gun violence committed by any individual will be met with the strictest sanctions. As a testament to its success, violent crime in the Sursum Corda "hot spot" decreased 36 percent during the

first year of the program⁵ and has dropped another 19 percent in the first 5 months of the program's second year.⁶

Neighborhood Partnerships

- Last year, the MPD's Regional Operations Command-East (ROC-East) collaborated with the MPD's conflict resolution teams, the Department of Parks and Recreation's Roving Leaders, DCPS, and the East of the River Community Partnership to hold a "Girlfriend to Girlfriend" summit involving over 160 young women from 10 major female gangs.
- The multi-agency Gang Intervention Partnership in Northwest DC created by the MPD two years ago continues to address the underlying causes of youth violence by engaging Latino youth in positive activities.

Systemic Prevention

- The MPD's Youth Problem-Solving Program (YPSP) engages teams of youth from the District of Columbia who are between the ages of 14-18 years old in completing a community-building project of their choice. The YPSP program is designed to partner teams of youth with community organizers and professional mentors whose purpose will be to participate in projects that will build the leadership skills of the youth, assist them in accepting civic responsibility, and work on ideas to improve their communities. YPSP participants form teams of mentors and peers to learn and apply MPD's collaborative problem-solving steps on a project that builds upon and utilizes community assets. After the completion of the projects, YPSP participants are prepared to apply collaborative problem-solving and leadership skills within their families, among peers, in their personal lives, and ultimately in their communities for sustained improvement.
- The Youth Advisory Councils include one to two representatives from every middle, junior high, and high school in each Police District. Their purpose is to advise police officials on issues affecting young people and to assist in problem-solving projects in their communities.
- The DC Fashion Idol program was initiated to provide females between the ages of 12-18 with a positive recreational activity, while at the same time affording the police and community members the opportunity to establish a rapport with these young women. The ultimate goal is to assist young people to become productive citizens by pairing them with mentors providing the necessary resources to help them fulfill their individual constructive ambitions.

In closing, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony today on the critical topic of preventing youth violent crime in the District of Columbia. I am available for any questions that you may have.

⁵ 2/1/04 to 1/29/05, compared to same period, previous year

⁶ /1/05 to 7/2/05, compared to same period, previous year